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Reminiscences of Fountain Green, Illinois

By C. C. Tyler, Fountain Green, Illinois.

I was born in Marietta, Ohio, of Connecticut parentage, on December 22, 1837, and came to Illinois in 1841, locating in Hancock County, at Fountain Green, twelve miles from Carthage the county seat of Hancock County which was organized out of territory taken from Adams County in 1829, on order of Judge Richard M. Young and had a population in 1840 of 9,946 which included the Mormon population of Nauvoo. The organization meeting being held at Fort Edwards, a military post established by Lieutenant Zachary Taylor in 1814, on the present site of the City of Warsaw on the bluff overlooking the Mississippi river and facing the Iowa shore opposite the mouth of the Des Moines river. This county is of historic interest as being the place where the Mormons after their migration to Missouri from Ohio, came later to Hancock County in 1839 and founded the City of Nauvoo, and later during the administration of Gov. Thomas Ford attained a population of about 15,000 in 1844. On June 27, 1844, Joseph Smith the Mormon leader, and his brother Hyrum, were shot and killed by a mob in the Carthage jail. This resulted in a miniature Civil War, known as the "Mormon War," and Governor Ford came here with a force of State Militia to enforce peace and order. Hancock County had at this time a larger population than Cook County. The Mormons under the leadership of their prophet, Joseph Smith built here at Nauvoo on a beautiful and commanding site overlooking the "father of waters" a city and a temple, costing a million dollars and which city contained the bulk of population of the county at that time, Warsaw eighteen miles below containing about 300, with Carthage the county seat, not as large, Augusta, St. Mary's, Plymouth, Fountain Green, LaHarpe, Chili, Monte-

bello, only a few families, the rest being in the City of Nauvoo, where they remained until the death of their leader, Joseph Smith, which resulted in disorganization, and reorganization under Joseph Smith, Jr., (son of the Prophet) and late of Lamoni, Iowa. The bulk of the Mormons under leadership of Brigham Young commenced their long and weary pilgrimage to Salt Lake Utah, in 1846. The first legalized ferry across the Mississippi river in this county was established at Fort Edwards by order of the county commissioners court of Adams County on March 7, 1825. "Ordered: That a ferry license be granted to Peter Williams to keep a ferry across the Mississippi river at Fort Edwards, on his paying a tax of five dollars besides the clerks' fees, and the following rates of ferriage be established, viz:

One Single Person	\$. 25
One Single Horse .....	.25
Head of Cattle over 1 year old .....	.25
Hog, Sheep or Goat .....	.06¼
Every Dearbon Wagon .....	.50
Two Wheeled Carriage .....	.75
Other Four Wheeled Carriages	1.00
Every cwt. dead Lumber .....	.6¼

The following hotel rates were also established:

For Each Meal .....	.25
Lodging per night .....	.12½
Half Pint Whiskey .....	.12½
Half Pint French Brandy .....	.25
Half Pint Rum .....	.18¾
Half Pint Wine .....	.37½
Wine per Bottle	1.00
Gin per Bottle .....	.18¾
Single Horse Feed .....	.12½
Horse fed per night ,with fodder and grain .....	.25

This ferry spoken of above was operated between Fort Edwards, Illinois and Alexandria, Missouri. The first settlers to come to this section of the State, were from Kentucky and Tennessee, later from New England, New York and Pennsylvania. The first judges of this circuit were Judge Richard M. Young, then James H. Ralston, in 1837; Peter Lott in 1839 and then Stephen A. Douglas in 1841, whose rapid evolution

in office was such that he was not given time to serve out one office, until called to go higher. Appointed to the office of Secretary of State in the Harrison campaign of 1840, he resigned in February, 1841, to accept a seat on the Supreme bench and was assigned to circuit duty, Carthage, Hancock County, being in his circuit. In 1843 he resigned to accept his first seat in Congress, and was re-elected in 1845, and resigned in 1846 to accept a seat in the United States Senate, succeeding James Semple; was re-elected in 1852, and again in 1858, defeating his great competitor, Abraham Lincoln. His firm and immediate stand for the Union in his great speech in Illinois, which served to solidify the democratic party of the North for the maintenance of the Union, and which stimulated the volunteer enlistment in support of the war for national existence, and in support of the Union cause, his untimely death, three months after the inauguration of Mr. Lincoln, are now well known matters of history.

Abraham Lincoln, Edward D. Baker of Springfield, Browning, Archibald Williams, Bushnell; Isaac N. Morris and others of Quincy, William A. Richardson and Bagby of Rushville, Cyrus Walker of Macomb, used to practice in this court at Carthage. Fielding Frame, who committed a murder in a saloon at Frederic, Schuyler County was brought here on a change of venue and tried before Judge Balston (who preceded Douglas), found guilty, sentenced to be hanged on May 18th, 1839, which was done. He was defended by Lincoln and Dickey. Mr. Lincoln moved an arrest of judgment for several causes, the paper being now on file among the others in the case at Carthage in Mr. Lincoln's own handwriting. Introductory to the Town of Fountain Green, I subjoin an "home coming" article from the pen of Noble L. Prentiss who enlisted from here in the 16th Illinois Volunteer Infantry 1861, and served during the war, later Editor of the "Carthage Gazette," and still later a brilliant writer on Kansas City papers and associate of Capt. Henry King of the "Globe Democrat, St. Louis, entitled, "From a Corner of Illinois."

“Fountain Green, Aug. 10, 1880.

“For the people on the elder and sunrise side of the United States it may be necessary to cross the foaming brine and go at least as far as “Drauchenfels,” to see and feel the antique, but to a Kansan, the sensation of beholding the venerable, can be realized by a journey to Central Illinois. The little town where this letter is written is on the eve of its semi-centenary: it looks almost as it did ten years ago: it has no more inhabitants than it had twenty years ago. One generation has passed away since the primeval settler came, and another generation casts a long shadow in the setting sun. The little graveyard is nearly or quite as populous as the village. There is something in a name, and this village was fortunate in its christening. There was a spot fifty years ago amid the rank prairie grass which generally grew as high as a horse, where there was a smooth turf, such as is seen in an English park. The sod quaked under the weight of a man; it was, in fact, a spring—the covering of a spring or succession of springs, and through openings in the turf the water could be seen and reached, while from the collected springs, the water flowed the year round a strong stream. The first settler’s cabin was reared beside this miniature “green garden,” and beside these “still waters” and the settlement, and later the township, was called “Fountain Green.” It was a happy thought and revealed a fountain of poesy in somebody. Perhaps the sentiment was contagious, or was in the air someway, but the county has been fortunate in the selection of names ever since. Our Lancaster and Shannon and Centre sound prosaic beside the Hancock County names, such as Fountain Green and La Harpe (dear to Henry King) and Saint Mary’s, and Saint Albans, and Sonora, and, most romantic of all, Montebello. Fountain Green, however, has the palm of originality. There are but two other postoffices of the name in the Union. One of them is in Maryland, and the other in Utah, and thereby “hangs a tale.” It was in this County of Hancock that the Mormons settled after their expulsion from Missouri, and reared on the magnificent slope at Nauvoo what was, for a time, a splendid country and city, and

a temple which must have been, as I remember it in childhood, a beautiful and imposing structure. Scattered over the county and city, they had agricultural settlements, and the church was recruited, not as now, from the dregs of foreign countries, but from the native population. Families of character and influence joined them, and in some instances families were divided, the father leaving his wife and children to enlist under the standard of the Mormon prophet, impelled, apparently, by the same conscientious conviction that has animated the thousands of sufferers for Protestantism, or for that matter, for Catholicism. In time the Mormons were driven from their home, from their holy city, from their houses and their lands, with violence, execration and insult. That they provoked the storm there is no doubt, but they none the less regarded themselves as sufferers for religion and conscience: as Israelites driven by cruel Egyptians, for whom God would some day prepare a Red Sea and a lurid vengeance. Their sufferings on their long journey to Utah form one of the saddest pages in the book of time. It seemed as if an avenging fury hung upon their track. If they went on, hunger and weariness marched in the van; if they halted, pestilence smote them as if it never would stay its hand; they died by hundreds, and North Seventh street in Atchison, Kansas, has since been driven through their poor bones. Yet, after all, smarting still from what they believed to be unmerited injury, after having placed many miles of wilderness between themselves and their foes, they yet remembered the old home, and somewhere in the mountains of Utah they named a wayside resting place, a few houses, and perchance a spring, Fountain Green, and there are remembrances and forgiveness in the sound. So much for a name in this case.

The railroads make and unmake towns in this age; and what they unmake seems to be more than they make. They bring more people and houses and elevators and general offices, but they keep changing them over and over, taking away one set of people to bring another, and, occasionally, as in the case of Atchison, taking away general offices and not bringing them back again. If you would have permanency, if you

would take things as you find them and leave them as they are, you must have no railroad. Fountain Green has no railroad, and so the names of fifty years ago remain today. I was looking over a merchant's book today, including a day-book kept forty years ago. The pages held accounts kept in haying time. I know it, because the debts were mostly for scythe stones and whiskey: the average being about one gallon of whiskey to one scythe stone. The same names are on the merchant's books today: but it is the sons and not the fathers: there are no accounts for scythe stones, for the independent Fountain Green farmer drives his own reaper; and no whiskey, for the town is "temperance" and he who would outrage his interior must seek the liquid insult in Keokuk, or some other city. If there are "sermons in stones" there is lots of history in day-books and ledgers. I saw in the books I have referred to, the pedigrees, the genealogical records, the commercial annals, the public histories, the general archives of Fountain Green, for four decades. I could tell by the purchases where the more or less rude forefathers of the township came from: where whiskey and saleratus were the only purchases, a southern origin was plainly declared as if written in the letter of light that rent the affrighted brain of Belshazzar. The entries brought up with startling vividness the good, old Saturday afternoon fist-and-skull fight and obelisks and pyramids of hot biscuits, "like cuckoo buds of yellow hue." The names told a good deal. The good old Scotch-Irish cognomens indicated the presence of the Pennsylvanians, who came here early, broad-shouldered, sturdy, big-boned men, who established Presbyterianism, "turkey roasts" and buckwheat, in the virgin wilderness. They are here yet, some of the first generation, a great many of the second, and a powerful fine start on the third. They were good men, those from Franklin County and "Pathe Valley", wherever that is, constitutionally brave, the Pennsylvania-Illinoisans of this township made a most gallant record in the war for the Union. Besides these the Western New Yorkers mustered in great force. The New Englanders were small, but, it must be added, select. The pioneer storekeeper, it is almost unnecessary to

state, was from Connecticut. Then there were the Kentuckians and Tennesseans, of two varieties: the half-horse, the half-alligator species, whose native ugliness was aggravated by a mingled diet of quinine, saleratus and whiskey; and the old-fashioned, long-legged and good-hearted descendant of Daniel Boone kind of men, who came to Illinois to secure a better chance for their children, and because, at heart, they disliked slavery. Many of these men were the earliest and most steadfast supporters of progress. To the "sure enough" Kentuckians belong the Lincolns, who were among the very first—the family to which President Lincoln belonged was not a numerous one, and probably more of his kindred are collected in this county and township than anywhere else. Mordecai Lincoln, the president's uncle, came to Fountain Green from Grayson County, Kentucky, at least fifty years ago. With him came his sons, Abraham, James and Mordecai, Jr., the first two, men of family, the last a bachelor, and their cabins were the first to break the prairie solitude. James B. Lincoln was the first justice of the peace, being commissioned in 1830—a kindly and perfectly honest man, who knew more about the men who lived about him than he did about law books, and who aimed to have justice done, whether the evidence was all that could be desired or not. He was general pacificator, and settled disputes, even of the complicated ones which arise from "domestic infelicity." Judge Lincoln's theory was that a certain amount of lariat must be allowed every woman, and that the sooner the husband found it out, the better for all hands. As he married everybody in his bailiwick, he was occasionally consulted by the unlearned in the law, who applied to him to unmarry them. In all such cases he counselled forbearance, a make-up and a new deal. Abraham, also a man of strong natural sense, served his neighbors as Justice of the Peace.

All these Lincolns are now dead, but their children and grandchildren and great-grandchildren live here. All of the name are reading people, and in politics are divided, the majority, I believe, being Republicans. In the great campaign of 1860, which fairly convulsed this part of the country, the

Republicans and Democrats of Fountain Green did their full measure of duty. The Republicans of Fountain Green township obtained a prize banner for turning out the largest delegation of "Wide Awakes" at a political meeting held at Keokuk, Iowa. *This banner was presented by the "Wide Awakes" later to Mrs. Frances Lincoln, the widow of James B. Lincoln. I saw the old banner the other day, it having been brought out to do duty for Garfield and Arthur, and I am not ashamed to say it affected me. The picture was a rude but faithful portrait of Lincoln as he appeared before he grew haggard and prematurely old under the burden of the great war.

But to return to the Fountain Green Lincolns. The religion of the family was the Roman Catholic. The brothers, Abraham and James B. Lincoln, were members of the Catholic church in Kentucky, and they are all buried in the old Catholic cemetery a short distance from the village of Fountain Green, as are other members of the family. The Lincolns were not, I think, originally a Catholic family, as none of the president's immediate family were of that faith. Mordecai Lincoln, the father of the three brothers I have mentioned, was, I am sure, a Protestant. His wife, however, was Catholic, and through her the old faith may be said to have been introduced into the family. It is probable that the elder Lincoln intermarried with the descendant of one of the Maryland Catholic families who migrated to Kentucky and then to Illinois. A number of the Catholic people from Kentucky were among the earliest settlers of Fountain Green, and their descendants still live in the township. They built a little Catholic church, and laid out a cemetery, of which I have spoken. The church disappeared some years ago. In the old days this church witnessed a sight not very common in the North,—the gathering of a Catholic congregation composed almost entirely of native Americans. Such are a few of the facts that I have recalled, and in the reflections that have come of themselves since I came to this "pretty little town," as Maggie Mitchell sings in

* This banner can be seen in the memorial hall at the tomb of Lincoln in Oak Ridge Cemetery, Springfield, Illinois, C. C. T.

"Loreli." I have said that the town has not grown in population in twenty years, but this does not imply a condition of decay. There are probably more houses in the village for the same number of people, and they are certainly much finer ones than those of ten years ago. I miss many of the cabins that I once knew in the little prairie that spreads out like a lake around, the town being the tree-clad island. The war swept away some of the inhabitants; Kansas has taken many more; rich men have added farm to farm; and the men who owned "forties" and even "eighties" have gone West after "quarters" and "half sections." The result, contrary to what might be expected, is improved agriculture. There certainly never was a more magnificently tilled farming country. It is one unbroken field, save where the timber grows. What we can say of Kansas, twenty-five years hence, is a matter of conjecture, but I know that some of these Illinois fields have been kept in corn for fifty years with scarcely a rest, and show no apparent diminution of fertility. It is odd, to a Kansan, who lives on hope and whose "chateaux" are all in the "Spain" of the future, to be in what seems to be a finished town or country, and yet this is such. I doubt if the traveler who emerges from the surrounding forest into the Fountain Green prairie some day when the sun is low, fifty years hence, will see anything different from the sight that met a Kansas visitor's eyes a few evenings ago. The slant sun will shine on the summer pomp of the level corn and wheat fields, as now, and the roofs and spires of the town, no larger grown, will rise in the midst of the billowy green of orchards; and the two tall poplars will stand a landmark just as they now do and have done for years; and the successor to the present village blacksmith will make music, sweetest at eve, of iron against iron, like the "sexton ringing his bell"; and the farm wagons, loaded and empty, will come and go in the long, straight lanes. Best of all, the flagstaff will rise in the middle of the little public square not, perhaps, as now, the peculiar flagstaff of the Republican party of the vicinage, but of some party inheriting its principles; and the flag will be the same as now, the flag that no party in the country can revile, or forsake, or

resist, and live: for that it might be so, scores of the brave men of Fountain Green fought where they stood, and were buried where they fell. I am loth to stop writing of the town and its people and its history, but I must, and I am sure the service closes with the heartiest of benedictions.